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TOP SECRET

Record of a meeting held at Admiralty House at 5.00 p.m. on Monday, September 11, 1961

Present:

Prime Minister
Foreign Secretary
Minister of Defence
Sir Frederick Hoyer Millar
Mr. Warner

LAOS

The Minister of Defence explained that the forthcoming ANZAM meeting to be held on September 20, 1961, would discuss the implications of the new American proposals for possible military intervention in Laos. He produced a map to show that this plan involved a substantial modification of Plan 5, and proposed the occupation of the whole of the south of Laos including a strip along the Mekong river, an area extending up north to cover Luang Prabang. It was clear that it would be very difficult to achieve this object and would involve a major military commitment. The new plan was really a plan for partition and involved putting a screen of mainly U.S. troops between Thailand and South Vietnam and the Communists.

Such an operation would undoubtedly run into serious difficulties in the United Nations and might be condemned by that organisation. Justification would be that North Vietnam had put their troops into Laos. The military advantage of the move was that it would at least keep one half of the country from Communist control and would seal off the frontiers of the other Protocol States and Thailand. However this operation would need very large numbers of troops which would have to be produced mainly by the United States.

The Foreign Secretary said that it was clear that the Americans were now going all out for a Government in Laos which Souvannah Phouma would lead. However they had also leaked their new military plan to the Thais and to General Phoumi. This might have the effect of destroying the chances of forming a Phouma Government but it was possible that the leak had been made deliberately as a political exercise in order to reassure the Thais; nevertheless it had been put to the United Kingdom as a serious proposition and must be considered as such.

The Minister of Defence said that he was unwilling to instruct the British military to take an obstructive attitude about these proposals since he feared that if they did it

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would only harm their relations with the Pentagon with no good effect. The Foreign Secretary said that he was quite prepared to discuss the matter frankly with Mr. Rusk.

The Prime Minister said that he agreed that on a purely military basis the Minister of Defence might authorise joint planning and examination of the new American proposal. The British military should however point out the size of the commitment involved. On the political aspects of the question the Foreign Secretary would talk to Mr. Rusk in Washington and would point out that one branch of the U.S. Administration seemed to be pursuing its own policy contrary to that of the President. The Foreign Secretary would try to bring Mr. Rusk face to face with this reality of which he seemed, however, to be personally quite aware.